

## University of Dundee

### What is Land?

Berdos, Yorgos; Zves, Konstantinos ; Lavantsiotis, Yorgos

*Published in:*  
InForma

*Publication date:*  
2020

*Licence:*  
CC BY

*Document Version*  
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication in Discovery Research Portal](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*

Berdos, Y., Zves, K., & Lavantsiotis, Y. (2020). What is Land? Nodes of a Mediterranean Journey. *InForma*, (12), 232-247.

#### General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in Discovery Research Portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from Discovery Research Portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain.
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal.

#### Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

# WHAT IS LAND?: NODES OF A MEDITERRANEAN JOURNEY

Yorgos Berdos, Konstantinos Zves, &  
Yorgos Lavantsiotis

## KEYWORDS

Territory, land, island, traveller, network,  
infrastructure, nation, exchange, sovereignty  
*Territorio, tierra, isla, viajero, redes, nación,*  
*intercambio, soberanía*

‘What is land?’ is a question that primarily revolves  
around three objects: the land, the sea, and the

island. Land is reachable and tangible, a stable  
terrain which provides the basic means of production  
and reproduction. Land is humanity’s primary  
construction site, both familiar and inhabitable.  
Land is extensively represented as a building site  
and a destination. This kind of identification is  
accompanied by the isomorphism of national terri-  
tories illustrated and graphed by cartography. Some  
of these cartographic representations include  
geopolitical demarcations in the form of boundaries,  
which historically are lines of constant redefinition,  
attributed to specific territories of sovereignty.  
While those characteristics may seem inherent, the  
only tangible boundary of land is the level zero:  
that of the sea.

The sea on the other hand is open, always  
posing the challenge of its own vastness against  
the land. The terrestrial terms that have been cast  
upon the sea create borders on its liquid mass. The  
imaginary lines of the land extend to the sea thus  
creating sets of zones, borders and areas that are  
hard to define or physically understand.<sup>1</sup> The mate-  
rial tensions that these imaginary lines produce are  
reflected through the definition of administrative sea  
borders and control over liquid territories. An island  
is a naturally formed area of land surrounded by  
water. An island is a piece of land that remains over  
sea level, even during the highest tide. According to  
the European Commission, from a socio-economic

04. Fernand Braudel, Maurice Aymard, and  
Filippo Coarelli, *La Méditerranée: L’espace  
Et l’histoire*, trans. Efi Avdela and Rika  
Benveniste (Athens: Alexandria Press, 1990),  
9-10.
05. Yorgos Tzirtzilakis, “The road not taken, For  
an archeology of the sea in the contemporary  
culture,” in *Nautilus: Navigating Greece*, eds.  
Maria-Xeni Gareizou, Maria Lagogianni-  
Georgakarakos, Spyros Makkas, and Spyros  
Petrounakos, trans. Colin MacDonald and  
Maria Xanthopoulou (Athens: Hellenic  
Ministry of Culture and Sports, Hellenic  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Hellenic  
Presidency of the European Union, 2014),  
(falta números de páginas).
06. Polynesia comes from the greek word πολύ- –  
poly- (“many”) and the word νήσος- – nisos-  
(“island”). We define as polynesia a territory  
that is formulated by a complex of floating  
artificial structures-islands.

Figure 1. Approaching an artificial island



perspective, a piece of land surrounded by water can be considered an island: only if it is permanently populated by no more than 50 inhabitants; if it does not have a fixed link or bridge between it and the mainland; if it is not closer than one kilometer from the mainland; and if it does not contain the capital of an EU nation state.<sup>2</sup> Metaphorically, an island can be any object which protrudes above the extension of a uniform element. For this project, an island is considered a remote landmark inside a homogenous scenery creating a sense of place, distance, and scale through a geologic juxtaposition—that of the land versus the sea [Fig. 1].

04. Fernand Braudel, Maurice Aymard, and Filippo Coarelli, *La Méditerranée: L'espace Et l'histoire*, trans. Efi Avdela and Rika Benveniste (Athens: Alexandria Press, 1990), 9-10.
05. Yorgos Tzirtzilakis, "The road not taken, For an archeology of the sea in the contemporary culture," in *Nautilus: Navigating Greece*, eds. Maria-Xeni Gareizou, Maria Lagogianni-Georgakarakos, Spyros Makkas, and Spyros Petrounakos, trans. Colin MacDonald and Maria Xanthopoulou (Athens: Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports, Hellenic Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Hellenic Presidency of the European Union, 2014), (falta números de páginas).

Towards a Mediterranean Cartography Our point of interest is the Mediterranean Sea, which is named under a sense of hetero-determination; *Mare Mediterrâneum*—"sea that exists between lands," signified solely by its topographic boundaries. The distinctiveness of this sea does not only come from its size and its landlocked nature,<sup>3</sup> but in that the Mediterranean is an island between the territories of culture. Its character can be reflected through historian Fernand Braudel's writing, which points out the existing multiplicity related to the unified entity of the sea: "What is the Mediterranean? It is a thousand things together . . . It is not one sea but a series of seas. It is not one culture, but cultures that are being accumulated over one another."<sup>4</sup> The Mediterranean Sea and the surrounding geography provide the means to host complex networks of mobility and conflict leading to an intersection of a variety of flows, activities, and situations. These include the movement of fishing boats, war ships, cargo ships, cruise ships, sailboats, the dense network of maritime cabotage routes, migratory routes, increased tourism activity, urbanization of the coastlines, long submarine pipelines, cables, military surveyed areas, regular deaths, shipwrecks, research teams, drilling activities, climatic shift, and movement of species

These events help attribute its special character but also some of them reveal the sea's gradual solidification, meaning territorialization. Nowadays,



this greater area contains numerous tensions intensified by the refugee crisis, and while geopolitical balances are constantly being altered, the Mediterranean ceases to be the mythical, primordial place of *transparency* and *encounter* between different cultures that shaped the western world.<sup>5</sup> Instead, it is a zone of crises.

In our efforts to map these networks, tensions and flows we made the decision to rotate the Mediterranean base map. The new base map aims to create a productive disjunction between the cardinal directions and the political sublime of “north,” “south,” “east,” and “west.” It takes away the immediate experiential connection of the designer with the territorial map and it remains open for interpretations from the project’s reader [Fig. 2].

## NEW CONSTRUCTION SITES

The Mediterranean Sea is the new construction site on which we investigate the founding conditions of the concept of land [Fig. 3]. This vast, liquid area is defined by the specific local geopolitical, economic, and ecological characteristics the we tried to map. Paradoxically, the Mediterranean remains both open and remote because of its size and landlocked character. The overall design approach applied in our effort to populate this construction site is that of a new archipelago, established by artificial floating structures proposed over international waters and overlapping exclusive economic zones (EEZs) that in some instances are still under dispute and hence not yet legally defined. The archipelago acts like as an infrastructural network with its components becoming an important part of the Mediterranean Sea’s dynamics, supporting and amplifying the flows of people, animals and commodities, while having them act as its context. Each node on the map represents a “polynesia,”<sup>6</sup> a territory formed by numerous floating structures, habitable islands, and utility structures [Fig. 4]. The archipelago is the new land, but this reduction is not absolute, each complex is capable of supporting human, animal, and plant life by providing basic means for survival [Fig. 5]. By becoming a part of the compact pre-existing network, the archipelago seeks to become the backbone of the Mediterranean Sea. The gesture of situating the new archipelago along the Mediterranean poses a matter of scale: a greater territory is being challenged in its scale by the redefinition of the existing distances. In this fully charted and identified area, a series of new floating destinations is created as extensions of the land [Fig. 6].

In our project, which considers how to handle these new lands, we are coming back to fundamental practices of describing and producing architecture, while harnessing an absolute grid and redefining strict typologies. Each island is composed of a series of spatial typologies where these defined

areas float on the designed basin and ultimately configure each island [Fig. 7]. The combination of these typologies—together, as a sum—form what we refer to as a “dwelling carpet.” This phrase communicates the habitable character of every island, each capable of hosting more uses than their ascribed one. We suggest habitability based on primary levels of provisions, such as the neutrality that derives from these conglomerated stable ground, shading, drinkable water, and energy. spaces is that of an infrastructure which makes the islands ready to receive flows and become objects of change, action, accumulation, deformation, and desertification.

## ARTIFICIAL ISLANDS

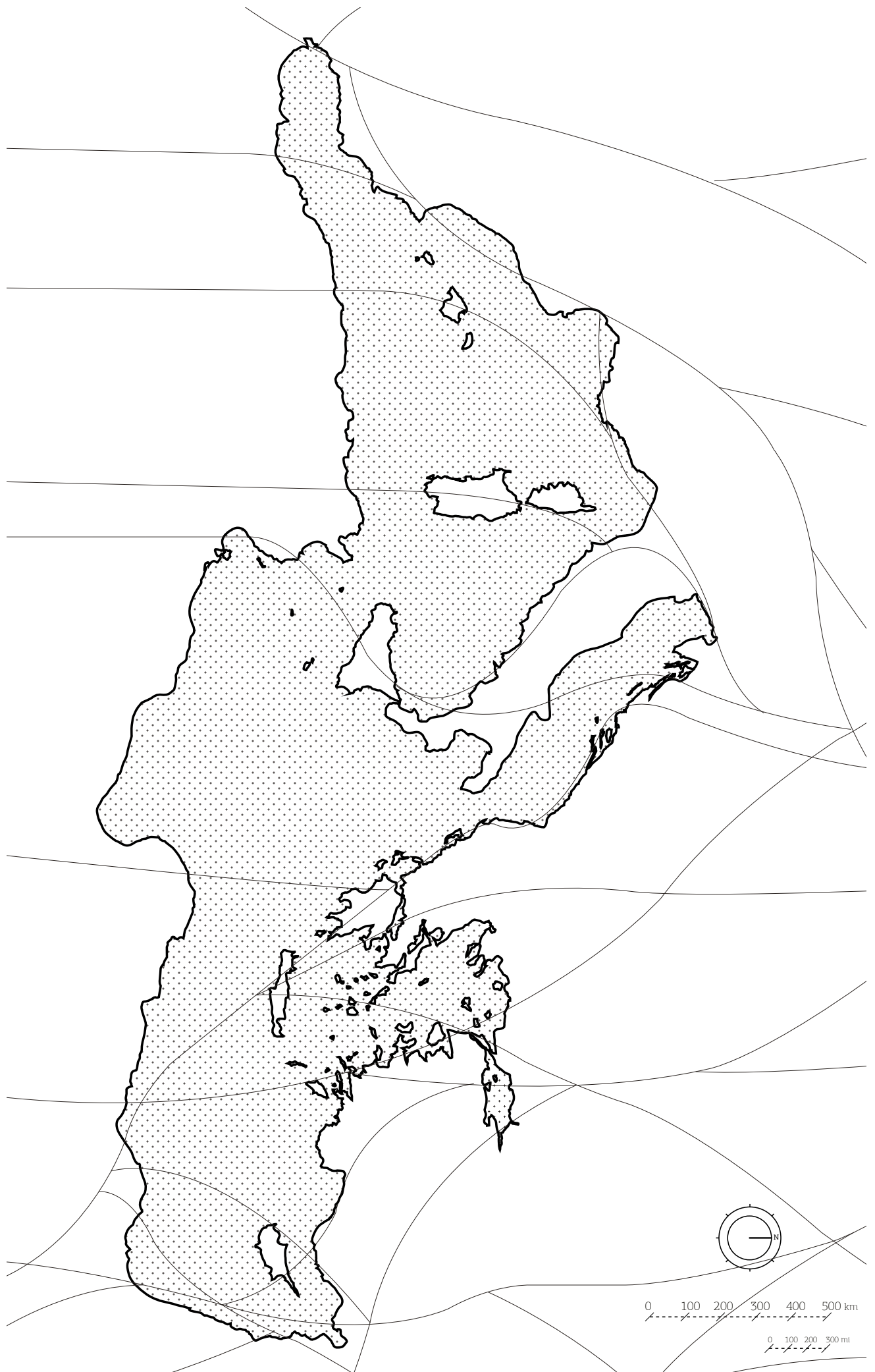
We define a three-dimensional structural grid, which is comprised by individual “dry,” watertight volumes [Fig. 8]. These volumes form the floating base—a basin partially submerged under water. This basin floats due to fundamental fluid laws of physics [Fig. 9]. This proposed grid alleviates the movement of the open sea, enabling a relatively stable final “land.” With this logic, we form the basic structure of our floating construction—the artificial island. Then, starting from two specific and fixed island sizes in terms of areas (one and two hectares) we transform the grid so as to create engulfments, crossings, and regions. The sizes of the islands remain stable, while their coastlines can change. There is no unique and singular solution, only possible versions of it [Fig. 10].

Each island is made of individual spatial typologies, which are inscribed inside fixed rectangular volumes that fit the structural, floating grid-basin. By rearranging the typologies, we are able to compose different combinations of these islands. Occasionally the neighboring condition of some typologies affects and change their morphology, resulting in moments of “micro-architectural” experimentations [Fig. 11]. Some of these typologies include [Fig. 12]: *level changers*, which offer access to the typologies that are located on a higher level, and which due to their amphitheatrical form, host most of the gatherings, performances, and social activities; the *green*, which includes trees—a small micro-ecology imagined as an oasis inside the salty desert—and can be used to host animals that have been transported to the island or can be a potential spot for migratory birds to rest in; the *empty field*—the simplest typology—with its built-in equipment such as counters, benches, small columns, lights, and faucets to foster trade, sleep, and new constructions; *covered field* offering shadow; the *interruptor*, accessible only from one side through stairs, which secludes activities; the *capacitors*, which are the highest elements of each island, forming the island’s ridge while constituting a reference point that aids navigation on the island; and the *fungus*, which is located on the threshold with the sea and defines the entrances and the exits of each island while creating small gulfs on the periphery of each island where boats can dock.

All the typologies together, situated on an artificial island, compose what we refer to as the

06. Polynesia comes from the greek word πολύ- – poly- (“many”) and the word νήσος- – nisos- (“island”). We define as polynesia a territory that is formulated by a complex of floating artificial structures-islands.

Figure 2. migratory birds routes



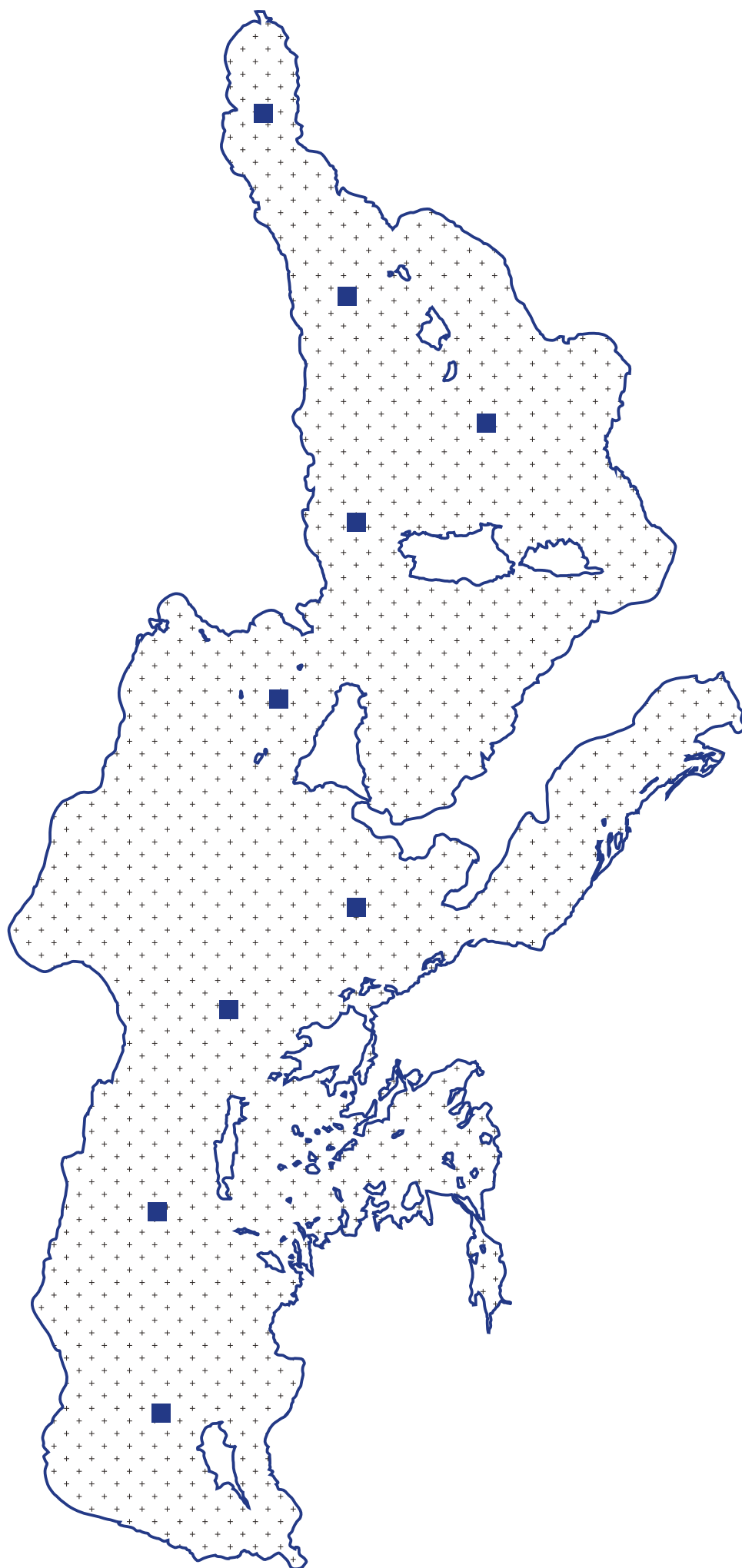
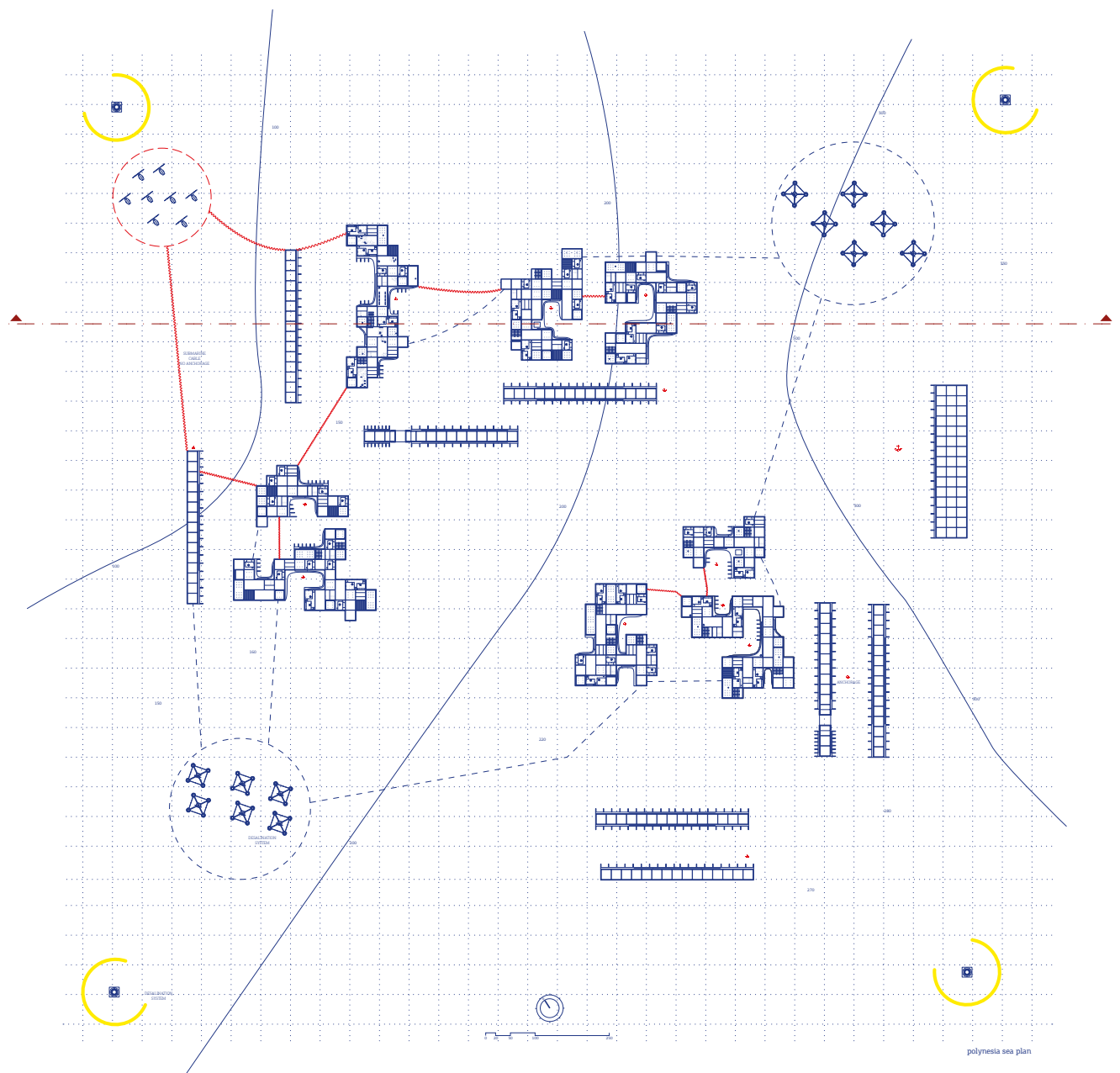


Figure 3. New construction sites

Figure 4. Polynesia plan



*kourelou* of habitation—or dwelling carpet. *Kourelou* is a hand-woven textile, for the creation of which thin strips of various fabrics have been combined to then be used as a carpet. This phrase reflects our aim for the islands to serve a certain function, while being able to accommodate many more: basic needs like shade, water, electricity, infrastructure for kitchen and bathrooms not only combine with the equipment and shipments each wanderer brings when they first arrive, but also with whatever has been left there from previous travelers. This *kourelou* is continuously woven by unexpected modes of inhabiting [Fig. 13]. The possibility of the spaces to change according to the use, the indeterminacy of territorial legislation as an aftereffect of the specific geographical position, and the changing ambient of each place, make each island a land suitable for the manifestation of activities and events operating outside traditional terrestrial conventions [Fig. 14].

#### HOMO ISLANDER

The islands become continental through their relations and connection with the land but also with one another.

Their differentiations will emerge through time. We predict some islands will be renowned for the untaxed activities that they will host, others for the huge variety and quantity of fish that local fishermen will bring; others will have human activity only in during the summer season, while on another, 123 people will be saved from drowning. A micronation also being a possible outcome.

Further interconnection between the islands might provide new factors of identification, characteristics will continuously transfer from one to another. The wanderers of the Mediterranean Sea will be the protagonists of this process. By floating in this mediatory space, far away from the land, the islands' architectures make possible and generate the terms for something else to happen. Here, the subject escapes terrestrial terms of identification, experiencing a sort of non-identity [Fig.15]. The islands, removed from their cultural and political context, have nothing to stand against. They stand remote inside a dense network as landmarks in the vacant unity of the sea, producing a desire that will make every island something more than just infrastructure: a land with a new mythology created

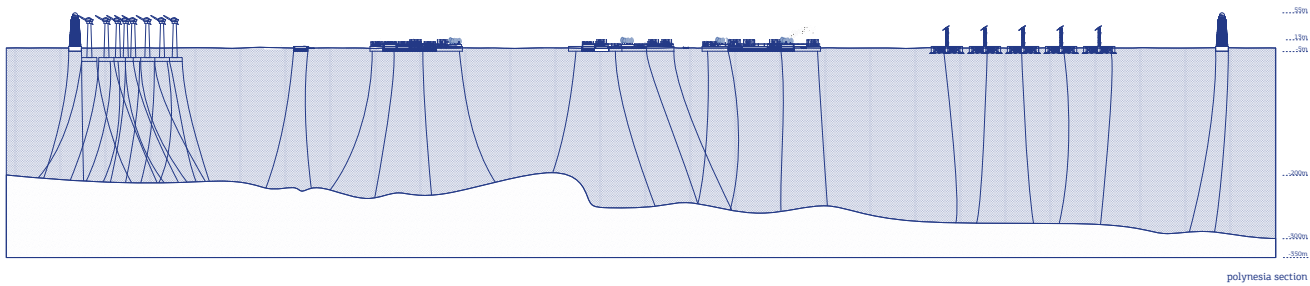


Figure 5. Polynesia section

by the unexpected encounters that the sea produces by default.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Agamben, Giorgio. *The Omnibus Homo Sacer*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2017.

Antonioni, Michelangelo, dir. *L'Avventura*. Italy: Cino Del Duca, 1960. Videocassette (VHS), 145 min.  
Balibar, Étienne. *Politics and the Other Scene*. Radical Thinkers. London: Verso Books, 2012.

Braudel, Fernand, Maurice Aymard, and Filippo Coarelli. *La Méditerranée: L'espace et l'histoire*. Translated by Efi Avdela and Rika Benveniste. Athens: Alexandria Press, 1990.

Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions. Islands Commission. "The Islands Commission's remarks on the Consultation Relating to the Conclusions of the Fifth Report on Economic, Social and Territorial Cohesion." January 2011. *European Commission*. [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/archive/consultation/5cr/pdf/answers/interest/cpmr\\_islands\\_commission\\_2011\\_01\\_31\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/archive/consultation/5cr/pdf/answers/interest/cpmr_islands_commission_2011_01_31_en.pdf).

Hardt, Michael, and Antonio Negri. *Empire*. Translated by Denis-Armand Canal. Fait et cause 3635. Paris: 10/18, 2004.

Iveković, Rada. "Translating Borders: Limits of nationalism, transnationalism, translationalism." *eipcp.net*. March 2008. Accessed November 06, 2015. <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0608/ivekovic/en>.  
Kotsoni, Elektra. "Urbanization Is Swallowing the Coastline of the Mediterranean." *Vice* (blog). December 05, 2012. Accessed September 12, 2016. [https://www.vice.com/en\\_us/article/znq7mx/nick-hannes-mediterranee](https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/znq7mx/nick-hannes-mediterranee).

Mezzadra, Sandro, and Brett Neilson. *Border as Method, Or, the Multiplication of Labor*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2013.

Rimenidis, Yorgos. "Thickening the 'Unthinkable'" *MAS Context* 17, Boundary (Spring 2013): 104-113. Accessed June 02, 2017. [http://mascontext.com/pdf/MAS\\_Context\\_Issue17\\_BOUNDARY.pdf](http://mascontext.com/pdf/MAS_Context_Issue17_BOUNDARY.pdf).

Solomon, Jon. "Rethinking the Meaning of Regions: Translation and Catastrophe." *eipcp.net*. March 2008. Accessed April 06, 2017. <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0608/solomon/en>.

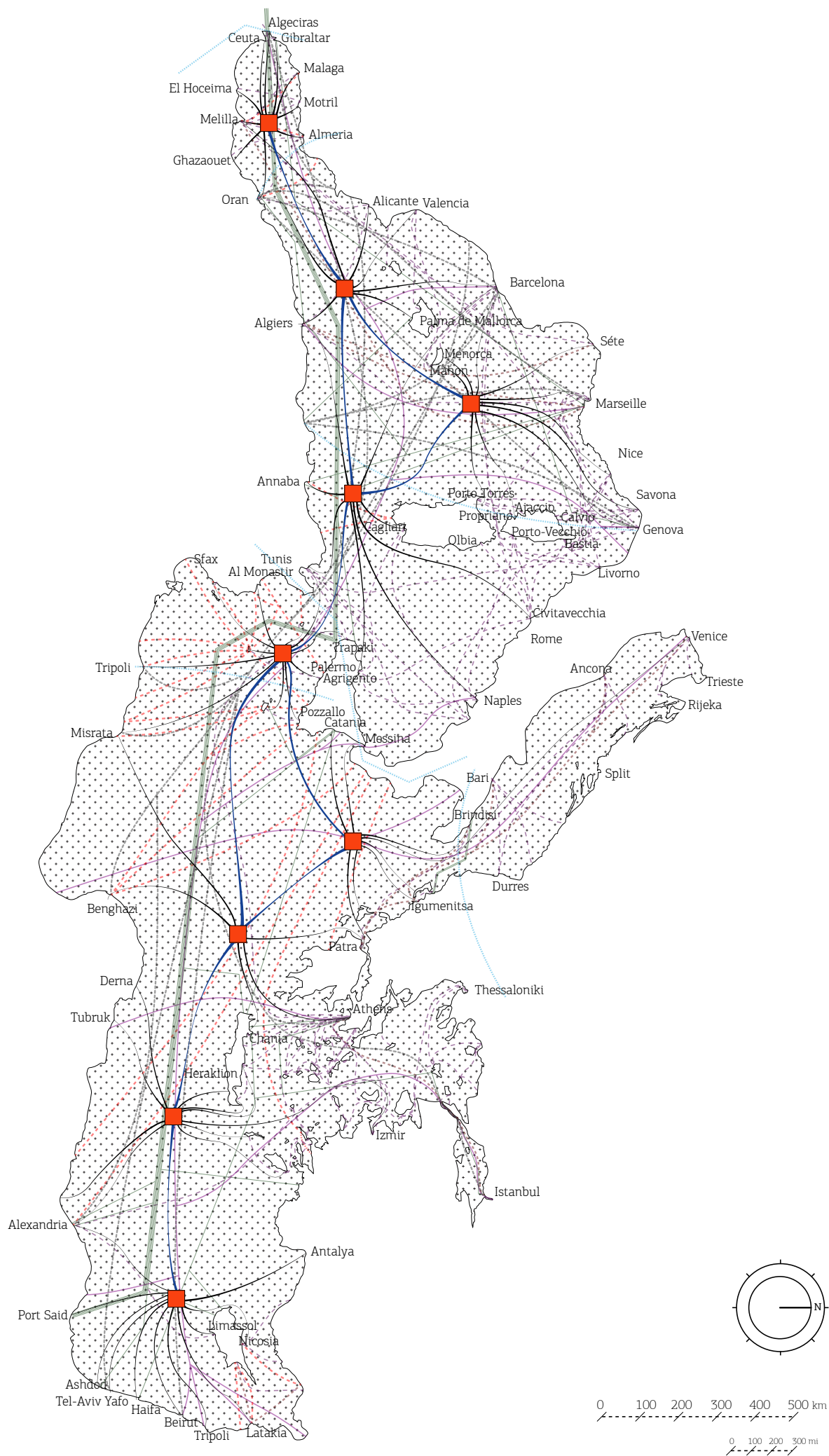
Sumrell, Robert, and Kazys Varnelis. *Blue Monday: Stories of Absurd Realities and Natural Philosophies*. Barcelona: Actar, 2007.

Tzirtzilakis, Yorgos. "The road not taken: For an archaeology of the sea in the contemporary culture." In *Nautilus: Navigating Greece*, ed. Maria-Xeni Garezu, edited by Maria Lagogianni-Georgakarakos, Spyros Makkas and Spyros Petrounakos, (falta números de páginas). Translated by Colin MacDonald and Maria Xanthopoulou. Athens: Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports, 2014.

Wolf, Michaela. "Translation – Transculturation: Measuring the Perspectives of Transcultural Political Action." Translated by Kate Sturge. *eipcp.net*. April 2008. Accessed June 5, 2016. <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0608/wolf/en>.



Figure 6. Polynesias linked



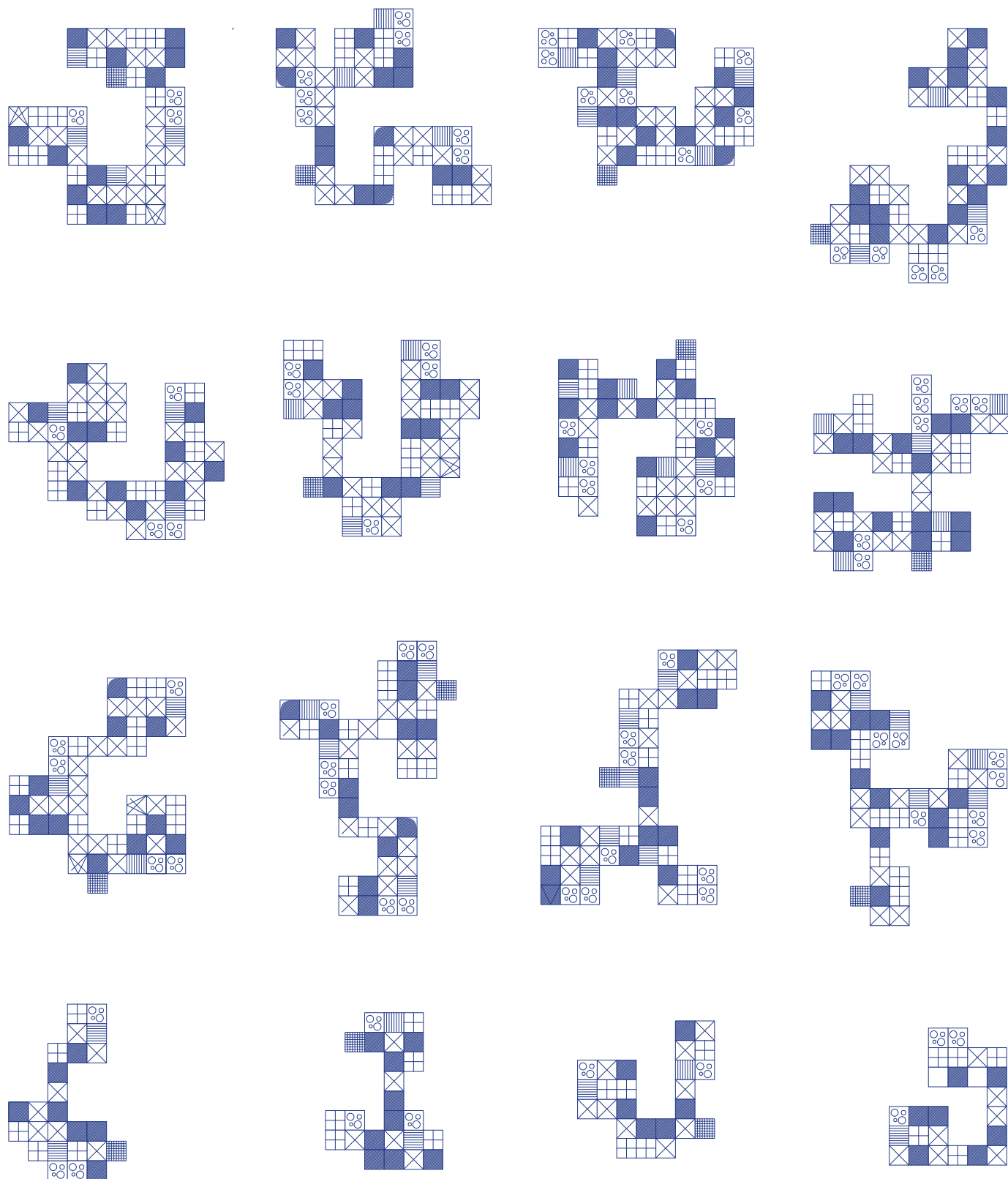
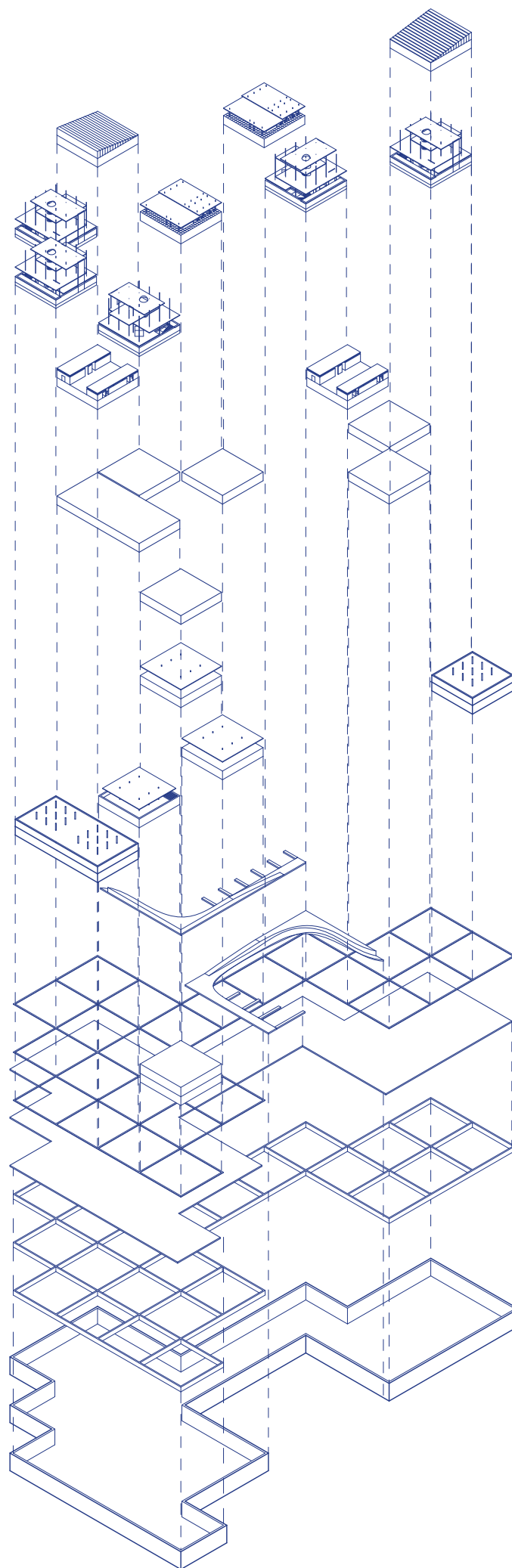


Figure 7. Island list

Figure 8. Exploded axo grid



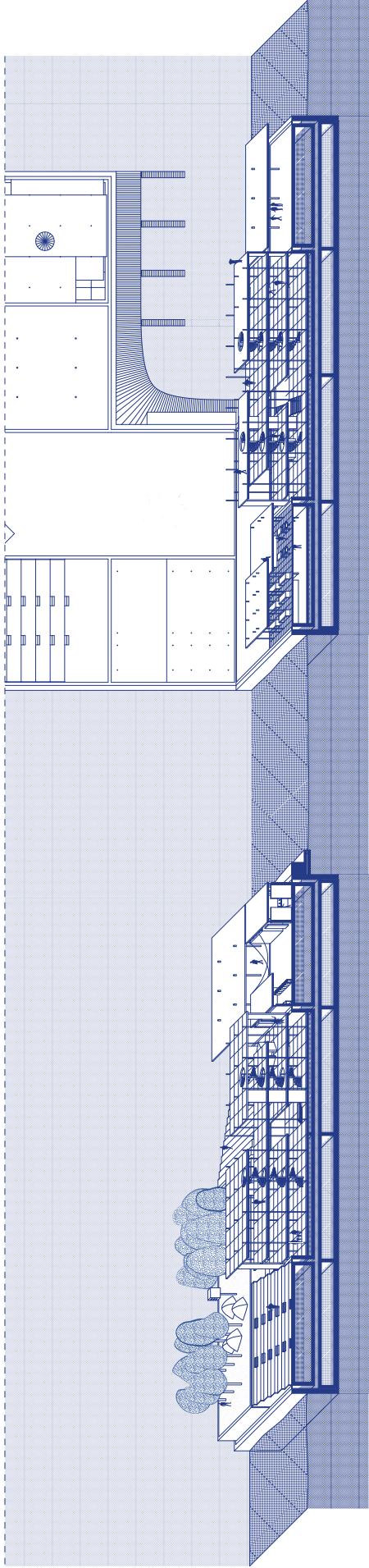


Figure 9. Axo section 2

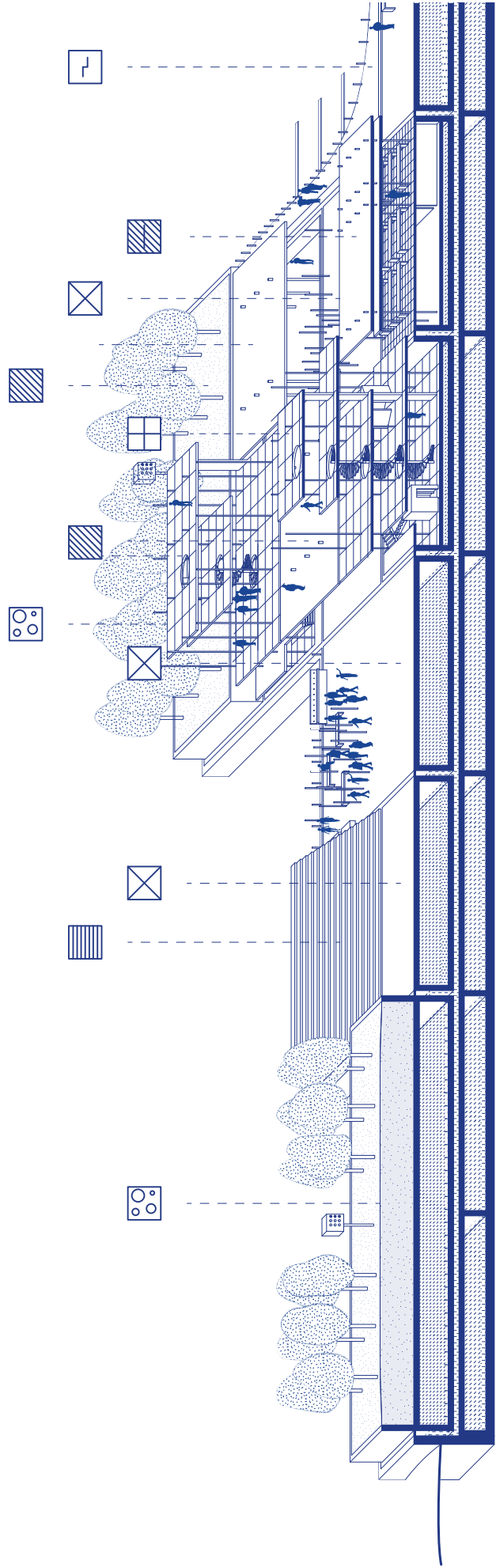
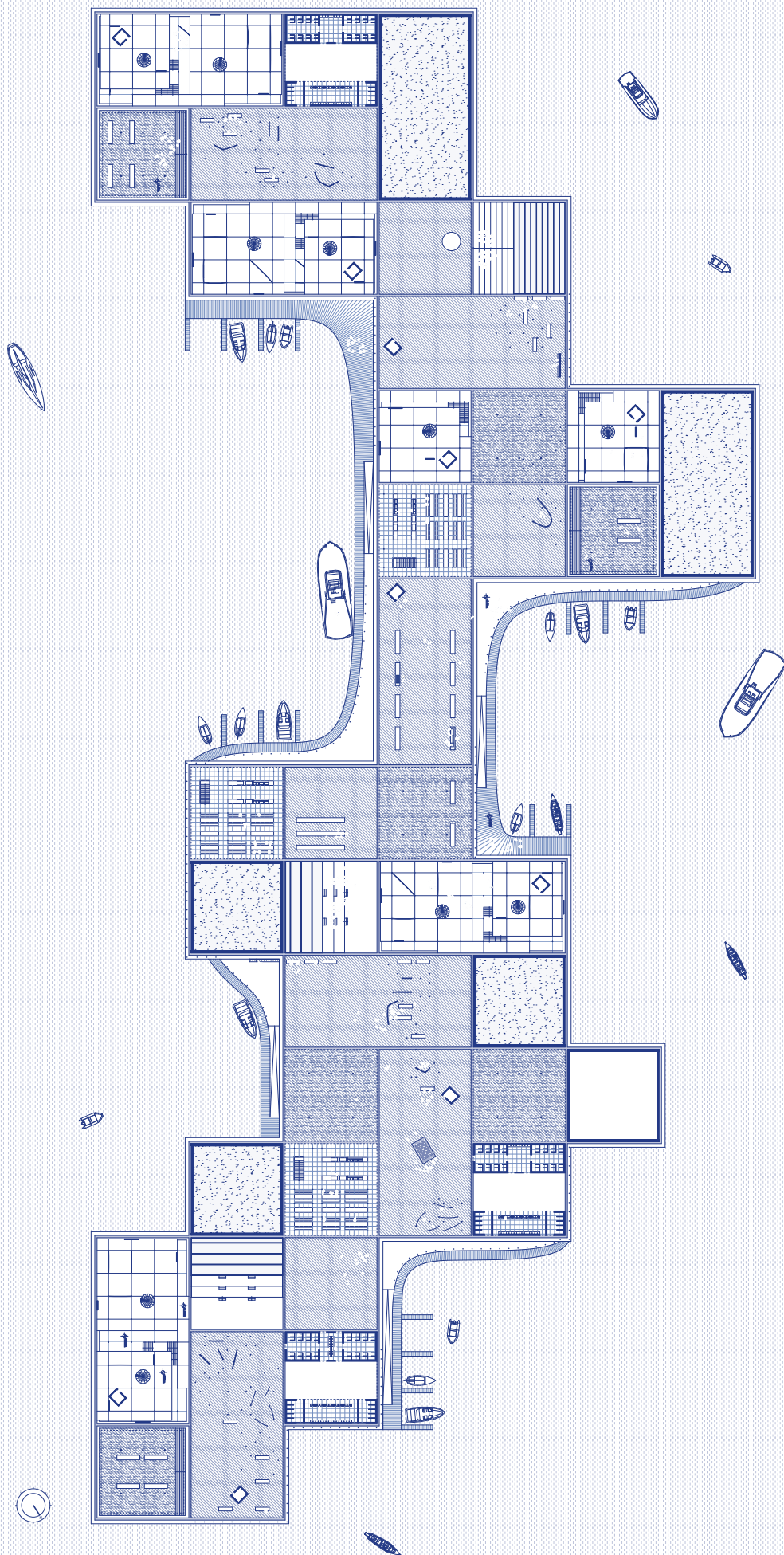


Figure 10. Section left



Figure 11. Whole plan



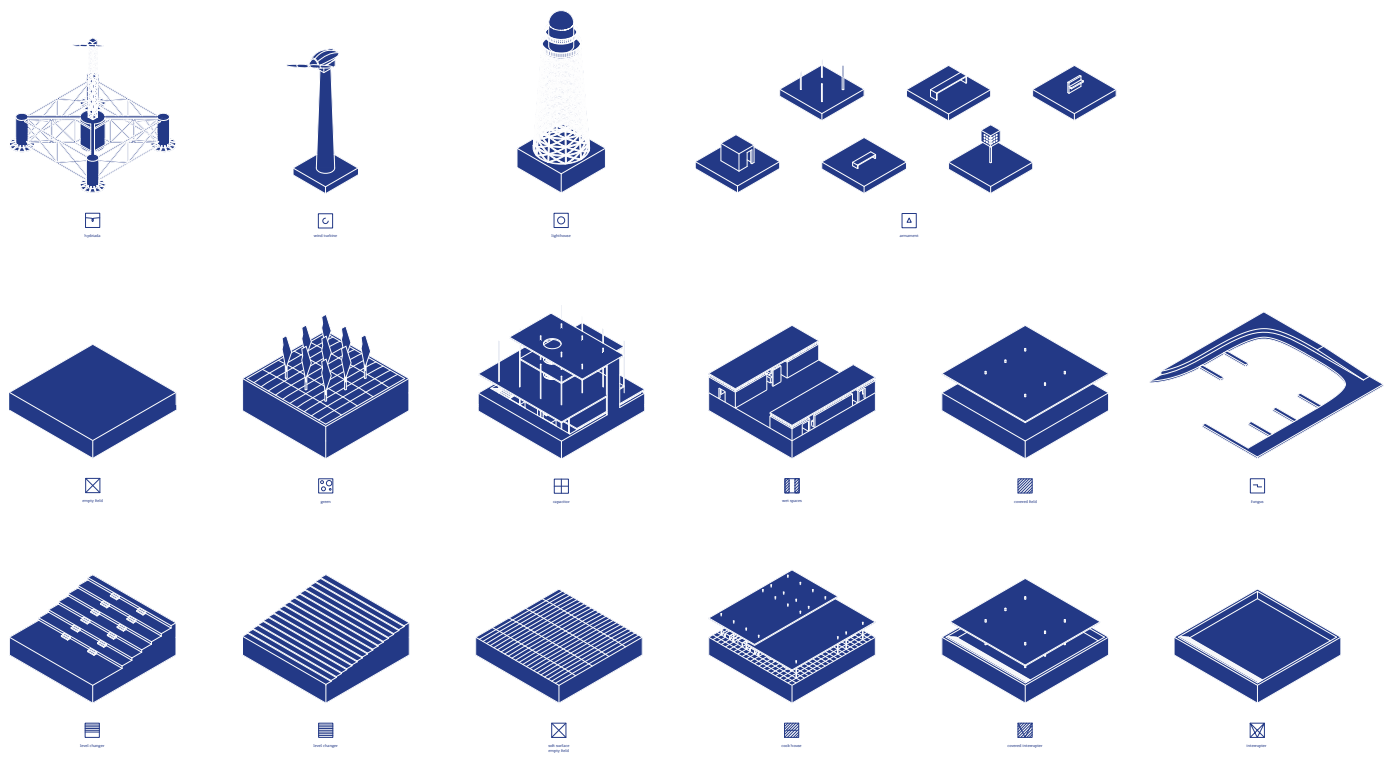


Figure 12. Typologies

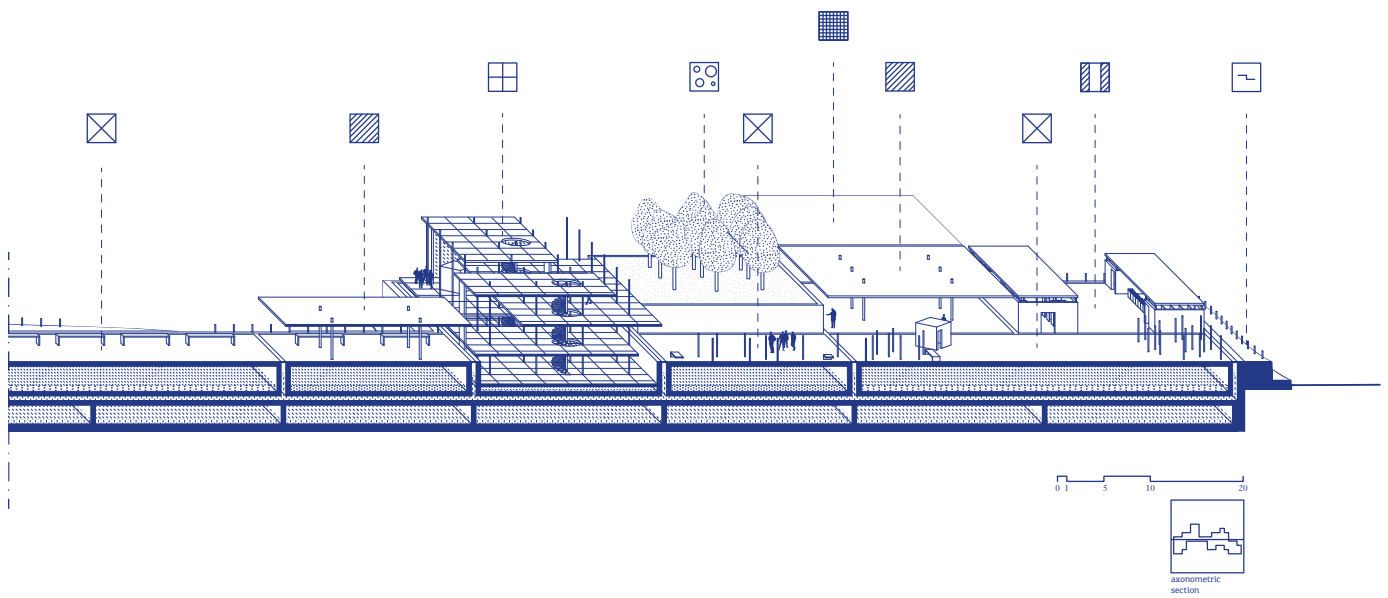


Figure 13. Section right

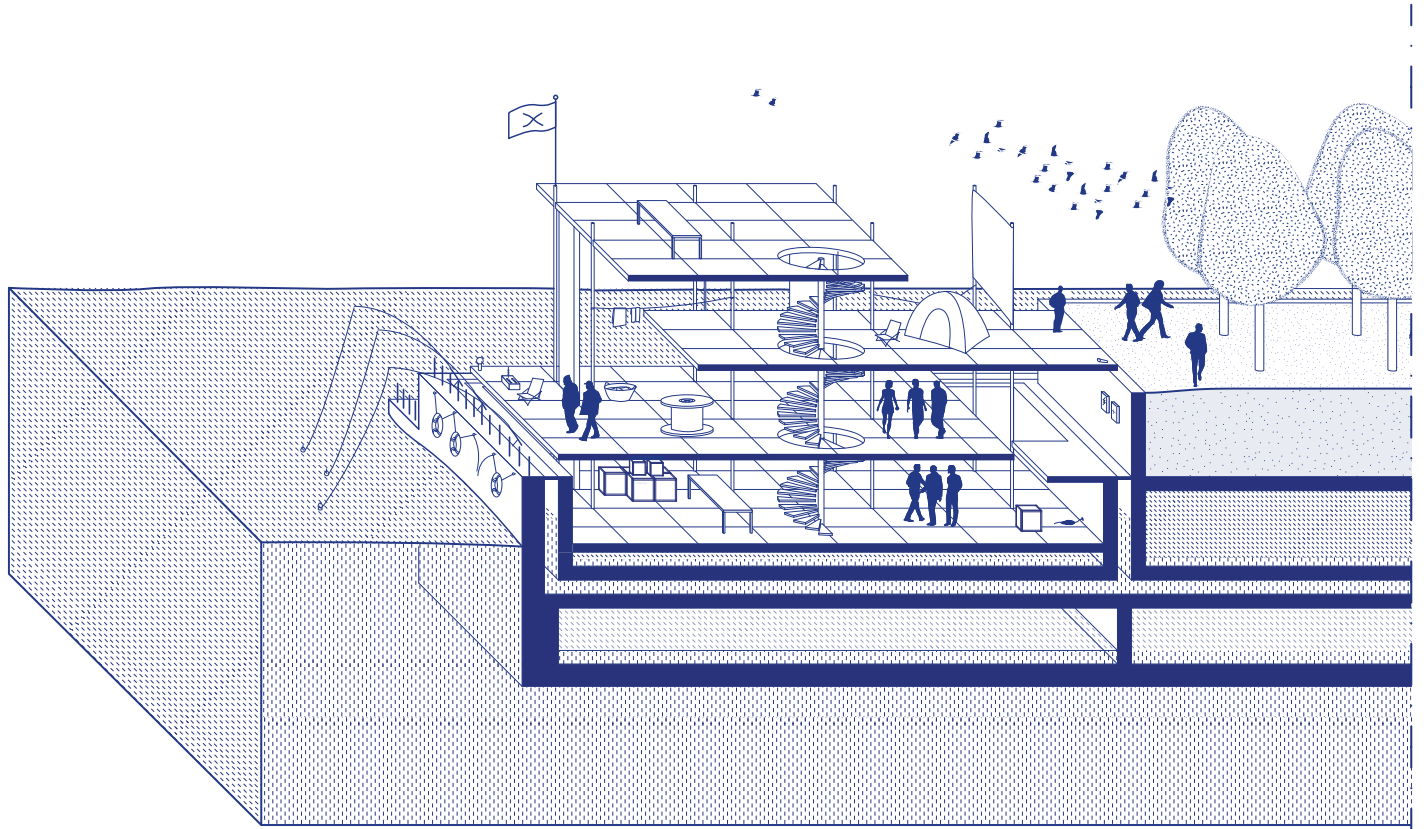


Figure 14. Meta plan small





Figure 15. Instant spontaneous base and the edge